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DISCOURSE,

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DEC. 29, 1799.

BEING THE LORD'S DAY AFTER HEARING THE DISTRESSING INTELLIGENCE OF

THE DEATH OF

7259

General George Washington,

LATE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

AND

COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE AMERICAN ARMIES.

By THADDEUS MASON HARRIS, A.M.

Charlestown:

PRINTED BY SAMUEL ETHERIDGE.

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DISCOURSE.

CAUTIOUSLY as I have avoided the delineation of character or the diſcuſſion of public affairs in the deſk, I now feel the propriety of introducing them. Yet let it not be thought that I miſtake the office of the chriſtian teacher, or miſapply the appropriate ſervice of this ſacred day. I do not interrupt the ſolemnities of the ſanctuary to compliment human greatneſs or flatter human vanity. I come not to blend the ſpirit of the world with the ceremonies of religion. But I come to humble the pride and abaſe the aſpiring thoughts of man, by ſhewing that the higheſt elevation of rank, or dignity of ſtation, gives no ſecurity, no prerogative, againſt the common fate. I come to remind you that the *great* as well as the *ſmall* are alike mortal, and that, though potentates and rulers are ſtiled GODS, they muſt die like *men*. I come to ſhew you the enſigns of the mighty deſpoiled by death and made trophies of the grave: and to read you a ſalutary leſſon on the inſtability of all earthly

expectations and glory. I come to tell you that the afferter of our country's cauſe, the purchaſer of its liberties, and the guardian of its Independence is no more :—that WASHINGTON *is dead !*—The ſolemn tidings are echoed in groans throughout our continent. The intelligence ſtrikes an awe which will be felt throughout the world. Well may we exclaim in thoſe words inſerted in the

2d. SAMUEL, I. 19.

"*HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN, AND THE WEAPONS OF WAR PERISHED !*"

AGAIN are we aſſured that the mightieſt cannot reſiſt the power of death. He who braved the deſtroyer in the field of battle, when "thouſands fell at his ſide, and ten thouſand at his right hand ;" the intrepid hero, the invincible warrior, muſt at length fall before the conqueror of conquerors, before whom "flight ſhall fail the ſwift, the ſtrong ſhall not ſtrengthen his force, neither ſhall the mighty prevail ;" for no courage can withſtand that conteſt, and "there is no diſcharge in that war." Elſe WASHINGTON, "the valiant, the mighty man, the man of war," had yet lived ſecure in his valor, invincible in his might. But the "laſt enemy" hath obtained a victory over him, and completed a triumph which proſtrates a nation's glory.

At this moment, when every American dwells upon the character of the ILLUSTRIOUS DECEASED, with admiration of his virtues, with gratitude for his ſervices, with lamentations at his death; it will naturally be ſuppoſed that "the prieſts, the miniſters of the Lord, will mourn alſo at the altar," and "ſigh with bitterneſs becauſe of the tidings" that "the mighty man is fallen by whom the Lord gave deliverance to our nation:" and *you*, my hearers, will expect *me* to give utterance to your feelings and my own on this ſolemn occaſion. Come, then, let us diſcourſe of WASHINGTON. The ſubject cannot fail of being intereſting and edifying.

To the biographer and the hiſtorian belong the narrative of his life, and the detail of his military and political ſervices. The very annals of our federated republic are but records of his deeds, its national importance and proſperity a monument to his glory. Yet it cannot be amiſs, my hearers, to remind you of a few particulars which will ſhew how many are our obligations for his ſervices, and how much reaſon we have to revere his memory.

He ſeemed to be raiſed up by Heaven and ſpecially qualified for the conſpicuous part he was to act on the theatre of life. Favored with a firm and robuſt conſtitution of body, a

bold and enterprising spirit, and a clear and comprehensive mind, he was alike calculated to endure the hardships and lead the forces of the field; and to direct the counsels and execute the decisions of the cabinet.

His early youth was honored with military rank, and employed in a civil embassy :* and exhibited specimens of valor, prudence, wisdom, and fidelity, strongly indicative of future greatness ;† so that a pious and eminent divine of those days,‡ speaking of his gallant services, says, "I may point out to the public that heroic youth, Colonel Washington, whom I cannot but hope Providence has hitherto preserved in so signal a manner for some important service to his country."

We will pass on to the time when these prophetic words were to receive their accomplish-

* In the year 1753, at the age of 21, and already a major and adjutant general in the Provincial service, he was deputed by the governor of Virginia to hold a treaty with various nations of the Western Indians; and, at the same time, he was honoured with a mission to the commander in chief of the French on the Ohio, remonstrating against the inroads they were making on the territory of Virginia, in violation of subsisting treaties between England and France.

† "The gravity and prudence of his youth
The world then noted; and his name was great
In mouths of wisest censure."

‡ Rev. Mr. Davies, then of Virginia, afterwards President of Princeton College.

ment, and the "important ſervice" which they predicted was to be performed.

At the commencement of our late revolution, the provincial congreſs, apprized of his abilities, bravery and worth, "unanimouſly elected and appointed him Commander in Chief of the forces raiſed or to be raiſed for the defence of the Colonies." With unaffected diffidence he accepted the "extenſive and important truſt," declining in the moſt noble and diſintereſted manner, all pecuniary recompence; and entered upon its "momentous duties" with a reſolution to exert every power he poſſeſſed in the ſervice of his injured country, and for the ſupport of its glorious cauſe: and he did exert them with the utmoſt vigor and the happieſt effect.

Recollect, my friends, for one moment, the perplexing cares with which he was beſet, and the inexpreſſibly trying difficulties he had to encounter. Behold him leading to the field a multitude of hardy peaſants, haſtily aſſembled, deficient in military experience and ſkill, miſerably equipped, and almoſt entirely deſtitute of warlike ſtores, to contend with the braveſt generals, and beſt diſciplined troops* of the mightieſt empire on the globe! Behold him marſhalling and exerciſing his ſoldiers; forming them to

* Hence they were called Regulars through the whole war.

habits of ſubordination ; inuring them to fatigue ; reconciling them to hardſhips ; accuſtoming them to ſuſtain with patience the long and tedious marches, the decampments, the retreats, the ſickneſſes, and the dangers of a doubtful and protracted war ; ſilencing their murmurs and quelling their diſcontents when they were deſtitute of money and unſupplied with proviſions ; training them by the practice of military evolutions to baffle the deſigns or defeat the attacks of a powerful enemy ; at times artfully magnifying their ſtrength, or dexterouſly concealing their weakneſs ; mitigating the calamities of war and preventing the needleſs effuſion of human blood ; waſting, by prudent delays, the forces of his adverſaries, and tiring them out by avoiding a deciſive action ; and finally triumphing over every obſtacle which ſeemed inſurmountably to oppoſe the progreſs of his arms and the freedom of his country ! And then ſay, was he not juſt ſuch a character as our exigencies required, and did he not purſue juſt ſuch a line of conduct as was beſt adapted to his own critical ſituation ? Had his management been leſs conciliatory, our own diviſions, oppoſite intereſts and views, muſt have proved our deſtruction. Had he been leſs prudent, " our enemies had ſwallowed us up quickly." Had he been leſs economical, our ſcanty reſources would have ſunk our affairs irretrievably low. Or had

he been capable of the mercenary conduct and vile defection of an Arnold, and abandoned his poſt, our armies had been immediately deſtroyed and our cauſe entirely ruined. But WASHINGTON not only poſſeſſed the prudence, the wiſdom, the perſeverance, and the valor which the great occaſion demanded ; but the integrity and devotedneſs to the cauſe which confirmed the judiciouſneſs of his appointment to the command of our armies, and aſſured all that the confidence was well placed which intruſted him with the intereſts and the hopes of America.

THE glorious termination of the arduous conteſt which cloſed his military career with ſucceſs, and crowned his country with liberty, independence, and peace, gave to his fame a luſtre ſuperior to that of the moſt ſhining characters in antient or modern times.

FORMER heroes were ſtimulated to deeds of civil enterpriſe or exploits of martial achievement by ambitious deſigns of perſonal aggrandizement or the lawleſs luſt of power : but he accepted command with reluctance ; exerciſed it with moderation ; voluntarily reſigned it, when he had accompliſhed the purpoſes for which it had been given, with the ſame humility with which he received it ; and with cheerful ſatisfaction quitted the ſplendid honors of exalted rank and

public office, for the lowly ſhade of retirement and the unambitious ſtation of a private citizen. Former heroes fought to extend their territories and accumulate property, and returned laden with the ſpoils of foes they had vanquiſhed and cities they had ſacked : but he fought only to benefit his country, endured the fatigues and perils of war, and refuſed all pecuniary remuneration but what was barely adequate to defray his neceſſary expenſes ; deeming his ſelf ſufficiently rewarded in having ſerved his country and deſerved well of it.* How matchleſs this conduct ! How unrivalled does WASHINGTON appear.

INSTEAD of employing an army now entirely devoted to him, and diſſatisfied with being diſbanded without receiving their ſtipulated wages, for the purpoſe of making his ſelf ſupreme or

* " AMBITION never was his leading aim,
But patriotiſm inſpir'd his great empriſe :
He ſought by noble actions in her ſervice,
To merit well of his beloved country,
Nor higher did his thoughts affect to riſe."

A BRITISH poet has thus celebrated our hero :

" THE honeſt muſe to virtue true
Now gives the applauſe to merit due ;
With WASHINGTON adorns her ſtrain,
His fixt contempt of ſordid gain,
His fixt contempt of ſordid art,
And all the virtues of his heart,
By wealth untempted or ambition's luſt,
Conſiſtent with himſelf, and to his country juſt."

redreſſing their grievances, he took an affectionate leave of the troops, requeſted them to rely on the juſtice of their much indebted country for the reward of their faithful ſervices, and moſt earneſtly recommended to them "with ſtrong attachment to the Union to carry with them into civil ſociety the moſt conciliating diſpoſitions, and prove not leſs virtuous and uſeful as citizens, than they had been perſevering and victorious as ſoldiers." They complied; for their beloved General gave the advice, and ſet the example. Converting the inſtruments of war into the implements of huſbandry, he retired to enjoy with his happy countrymen the hard-earned bleſſings of liberty and peace.

It would be pleaſing to follow him to his endeared home, to ſhare his hoſpitality and partake his friendſhip, and learn from him a dignified and exemplary diſcharge of the relative and ſocial duties. But he is called to engage in new ſcenes and to perform new ſervices. He had been inſtrumental in rearing the "ſtupendous fabric of freedom and empire": but, though built on a firm baſis and with ſolid materials, though well finiſhed *without*, there were needed ſome connecting braces *within*, and material repairs were found expedient through the whole *interior* which had been conſtructed only as a temporary accommodation. The maſter builder

of the whole was desired, with others, to suggest the necessary alterations and improvements. The result was a new modeling of the inner apartments and the addition of more pillars to support and strengthen the edifice.

The new confederation having been proposed and adopted, Washington was unanimously called upon to administer the government; for we had "no man like minded who naturally cared for our state," who so "loved our nation," and whom the people so much confided in and "delighted to honor." With his characteristic self diffidence and disinterestedness he accepted the trust, and governed us in peace with a *wisdom* excelling the *bravery* with which he had defended us in war. To his "moderation, perseverance and firmness," his judicious administration, comprehensive foresight, and watchful care, do we owe our neutral position, our exemption from the distracting politics and destructive wars of the European nations, and our continued prosperity and peace.

Having been twice elected President of the United States, and for eight years faithfully and honorably discharged the arduous duties of that exalted station, he declined all farther suffrages, choosing rather to lay aside the robes of power and be disengaged from the cares

of ſtate. Yet, on quitting the theatre of public life, on which he had acted ſo conſpicuous and leading a part, he was ſolicitous to improve his influence to the beſt purpoſes; and, therefore, bequeathed to his countrymen his affectionate counſel, the reſult of long experience and judicious obſervation, fraught with the moſt zealous ſolicitude for their welfare and the moſt ardent wiſhes for their proſperity.* He then returned to "that retirement from which he had been reluctantly drawn," and which, he ſaid, "declining years induced him to ſeek, and which repoſe to a mind long employed in public concerns rendered as neceſſary as it was welcome." But neither age nor ſolitude could damp his patriotiſm. He could not become indifferent to his country's welfare, nor inſenſible to its dan-

* The following extract from the *Britiſh Analitical Review* for January 1797, is worth repeating in America. Narrating the events of the preceding year, the writer remarks—"This year [1796] General Washington, the greateſt of contemporary men, reſigned the Preſidency of the American States. Having reſcued his country from the tyranny of the Engliſh government; and reſtored it, by a commercial treaty, to an amicable connexion with the Engliſh nation; he voluntarily retired from power, after giving the moſt profound inſtruction and advice reſpecting union, virtue, liberty and happineſs, between all of which there is a cloſe connexion, with the moſt ardent prayers for the proſperity and peace of America. There is nothing in profane hiſtory to which this ſublime addreſs to the ſtates can be compared. In our Sacred Scriptures we find a parallel in that recapitulation of the divine inſtructions and commands, which the legiſlator of the Jews made in the hearing of Iſrael, when they were about to paſs the Jordan."

gers. "When every thing we hold dear and ſacred was threatened," and it was neceſſary to aſſume the poſture of defence, he magnanimouſly conſented once more to take the Command of our Armies, and to devote the remainder of his ſtrength and life in ſupporting and preſerving the dignity and independence of the United States.

But the laſt act of his great eventful drama was now cloſing. "It correſponded with the whole tenor of his life." Though ſudden and painful the cataſtrophe, he ſupported it with magnanimity and calmneſs; and with graceful dignity made his exit.

Once more he retires from the cares and engagements which had worn out his life; not, as before, to the ſhades of Vernon, but to *the mount of* God: not to a ſhort, interrupted, and imperfect repoſe; but to enjoy the eternal, undiſturbed and perfect refreſhment and bliſs of Heaven. "He reſts from his labors, and his works follow him" to receive the recompence of unfading glory.

Surely, my hearers, he is to be conſidered as one of the moſt precious gifts of Providence to our favored country. Let us bleſs God for all the good which he made him inſtrumental in procuring for us; and that his life and uſeful-

neſs were ſo long continued; that he was ſpared to us till he had accompliſhed the moſt important ſervices we could aſſign him; and that he lived to ſee the nation, whoſe battles he had fought, and whoſe armies he had conducted triumphantly from the field; the nation, whoſe liberties and independence he had aſſiſted in obtaining, and in whoſe government he had preſided, enjoying in the higheſt degree the happy effects of his victories and counſels. May we never forfeit the independence, nor raſhly hazard the proſperity he helped us to acquire, and ſo well taught us how to enjoy and improve. May the general grief at his deceaſe be converted into a general and growing attachment to thoſe noble principles and exalted virtues which he honored and diſplayed. While we admire, let us imitate his diſintereſtedneſs, moderation, equanimity, temperance, hoſpitality, and charity: and may this moral worth be conſecrated as it was in him, by a ſpirit of ſincere, uniform and fervent piety towards GOD, and a diſpoſition of warm and extenſive benevolence to men.

How great the loſs of ſo much excellence! "How is the mighty man fallen by whom the Lord gave us deliverance!" "How are the weapons of war periſhed" in which we truſted

for defence! "Our breach is wide as the ſea; who can heal it?" Thouſands of men die, and are replaced: but the death of ſuch a man as WASHINGTON leaves a void in the world which ages will not fill up.